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AUTHOR Bowers, Henry C., III; And Others
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ABSTRACT

A political struggle has developed in Virginia between its state superintendent of public instruction and the educational community. The primary disagreement is in the area of teacher certification, although admission requirements to teacher education programs are also disputed. The Teacher Education Advisory Committee (TEAC), composed of representatives from the education profession, parent/teacher groups, and school administrators, is responsible for advising the state board of education on policies related to teacher education, training, and certification. While the board of education is legally the responsible authority in Virginia, the state superintendent has placed the board in the unprecedented position of choosing between the recommendations of TEAC and those of the superintendent on teacher certification standards. The TEAC proposal, supported by education professionals, requires the graduate's completion of a state-approved education program, either in conjunction with or subsequent to the baccalaureate degree, before receiving a two-year probationary certificate. The superintendent proposes the alternate route of allowing certification of individuals holding a liberal arts degree from an accredited institution. These graduates must meet one or more endorsement requirements for secondary education and be recommended by the employing educational agency. The superintendent's proposal would allow any college graduate the same status as graduates of approved teacher education programs, a two-year probationary certificate. It is the contention of educators that the superintendent's proposal reflects political expediency rather than concern for high quality of education for teachers and children. The board of education votes in December 1981 on the certification issue. (JD)

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THE BATTLE OF RICHMOND

Politics and Teacher Certification Make Strange Bedfellows

Henry C. Bowers, III
B. Keith Eicher
Annabel L. Sacks

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THE BATTLE OF RICHMOND

Politics and Teacher Certification Make Strange Bedfellows

Battlelines have formed in Virginia as barrages of proposals, suggestions, resolutions, editorials, letters-to-editors, public hearings and private opinion regarding teacher certification reverberate from every corner of the state. Everyone has an opinion - - ranging from thoroughly misinformed to thoroughly knowledgeable. The outcome of the battle will reflect where the real control lies; in the educational community or in the state legislature.

Realistically, the dichotomy is not as clearly drawn as one might like - differences have surfaced within the educational community itself with respect to the controlling function. However, when the State Board of Education finally votes into "regulation" the variously proposed certification requirements in December, 1981, Virginia is likely to emerge as a national leader in making teaching a non-profession!

The struggle for control of teacher certification began in earnest in the 1977 Virginia legislative session with the introduction of House Bill 2058, to establish an autonomous professional practices commission. Its introduction met with swift disapproval at the committee level and it has subsequently been resubmitted in one form or another in every legislative session since. The major impetus for the legislation came from the Virginia Education Association (VEA) which felt that the existing Teacher Education Advisory Committee (TEAC) to the State Board of Education functioned as nothing more than a rubber stamp for the State Department of Education. In addition, the VEA pointed out that the TEAC was dominated by members in higher education. Recognizing the power and strength of the VEA, the State Department of Education began to reshape the constituency of the TEAC. Today it reflects, almost to the person, the composition suggested in the VEA-sponsored legislation: seventeen members appointed by the State Board of Education as follows:

Elementary and Secondary Schools.....nine
Colleges and Universities with
teacher training programs.....one public
one private
Parent/Teacher Groups.....one
School Boards.....one
Division Superintendents.....one
At-large.....three

However, to further diminish the power of the VEA, the 1981 General Assembly passed into law House Bill 493, giving statutory status to the TEAC. The responsibilities of the committee have been changed somewhat. Prior to achieving statutory status, the responsibilities were as follows:

1. To review reports of the (program approval) visitation committees and to make recommendations through the Division of Teacher Education to the State Department of Education with respect to program approval or denial.
2. To inventory, renew, and make recommendations pertaining to (a) procedures used in approving college programs; (b) standards required of approved colleges; and (c) teacher certification standards. (Standards for Approval of Teacher Preparation Programs in Virginia, p. 47, January, 1979.)

Upon achieving statutory status the responsibilities continue to remain somewhat broad and non-specific:

> "The Committee shall advise the Board of Education on policies related to teacher preparation, training, certification, recertification, and certificate revocation and shall undertake such studies related to these matters as the Board may request or the Committee may deem necessary. The Committee may not advise the Board in individual cases involving certification, recertification or certificate revocation."
>
> (House Bill No. 493)

As a result, the battlelines have now been further delineated to include differences within the educational community itself which are as significant as those existing between the educational community and the legislature. Two proposals to revise teacher certification regulations, one from the TEAC and one from the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, went before the public at hearings in October, 1981. Previously, the proposal of the TEAC was submitted to the Division of Teacher Education of the State Department of Education. The TEAC had not yet achieved statutory status at the time its task was completed. The report had been submitted to open hearings in December, 1980, after which the TEAC and the staff of the State Department of Education took under advisement the opinions and suggestions expressed and made minor adjustments to the proposal.

At the same time, the Superintendent and his staff took it upon themselves to revise the TEAC proposal to meet certain other objectives. The result of this further revision was two significantly different proposals, both to be submitted to public hearings in October, 1981 and voted on by the State Board of Education in December, 1981.

The consensus among professional educators is that some of the most significant changes presented by the Superintendent and his staff are not in the best interest of teacher education or the teaching profession, but are the result of political pressure from influential state legislators and special interest groups (Cox, 1981; Grayson, 1981). The opinions expressed by speakers at the October hearings held simultaneously in four areas of the state, further substantiate this view (McManus, 1981; Reed, 1981; Squires, 1981). The current supply and demand figures suggest that some of the proposed changes are for the purpose of maintaining personnel in the classroom whether fully certified or not.

One of the most significant changes between existing regulations and the proposed regulations relates to admission policies and problems regarding the selection and retention of students in teacher preparation programs. The new proposals contain the following statement:

> "Requirements for admission to teacher preparation should equal or exceed requirements for other programs offered at the institution."

The major impetus for the inclusion of such a statement was House Joint Resolution 100 of the 1980 legislative session in Virginia. HJR 100 resolves:

> "that state institutions of higher education with teacher training programs are requested to renew their standards for acceptance of students into these programs in order to ensure that the standards equal or excel those for other fields of study . . ."

This resolve, according to James Yankovich, Dean of the School of Education at the College of William and Mary, reflects a point of view that appears to be receiving growing public acceptance; namely, that institutions of higher education, particularly schools of education, are not effective in accomplishing one of their assigned roles: preparing qualified teachers for the public schools of Virginia. The resolution also reflects the basic concerns of W. Timothy Weaver of Boston University regarding the academic ability and scholarship of those entering teacher training programs (Weave: 1977). This viewpoint was reinforced by Doyle Watts in the October, 1980 issue of the Phi Delta Kappan. He suggested that current admission criteria reflect minimal standards at best and even these are administered in such careless fashion as to be of little use (Watts, 1980). Although the intent of the resolution is meritorious in its efforts to upgrade the quality of the individuals entering teacher training programs, the rhetoric is sufficiently unclear, thus leading to confusion as

one attempts to abide by its intent. In referring to "other fields of study" the resolution does not specify whether these are other professional fields or merely any "major" at the university. As a result, the institutions which do not have other professional programs will no doubt operate under a different set of criteria than those that do and the intent of the resolution will not be fulfilled.

Another consideration that should be highlighted is that in most institutions of higher education the graduates of other major professional programs such as business and engineering are in a sellers' market and, therefore, may be more choosy. (Shortages exist even now in certain areas of teacher preparation, namely, mathematics, science, special education and industrial arts.) It will be interesting to observe as we move into the 1980's, and the supply of certified teachers diminishes as public school enrollments increase, whether the intent of the resolution can withstand a sellers' market. The indications are that it will not, as evidenced by the types of certificates proposed by the Superintendent.

Different routes to teacher certification have been proposed by the TEAC and the Superintendent. The proposal of the TEAC has the general support of schools, colleges, and departments of education (SCDE) and the VEA, while the Superintendent's proposal reflects the attitudes of certain legislators, private schools, the press, and other vociferous critics of teachers in general and teacher education in particular.

The severest critics tend to blame all the problems of today's schools on "ill-prepared teachers." These teachers are, in their view, the products of decades of useless and inappropriate teacher preparation programs controlled by SCDE (Grayson, 1981). These programs, they say, need review, revision, renewal - - perhaps even total elimination. A good deal of the problem, they contend, lies with the caliber of student opting for a degree in education - -

mediocre at best, as suggested by W. Timothy Weaver (Weaver, 1977). The answer to the problem of incompetent teachers, according to the critics, is to allow the "scholars" who have pursued liberal arts degrees to infuse the schools with their greater intelligence and knowledge - - their assumption being that teaching ability is synonymous with knowledge of content (Times-Dispatch, News Leader, 1981).

The TEAC has proposed that "candidates for initial professional certification as teachers shall be required to complete a 'State Approved Program.'" This requirement, supported by SCDE and the VEA, would require anyone who wanted to teach to complete an approved program either in conjunction with the baccalaureate degree or subsequent to it. It would serve to ensure that no one could enter through the "back door" of "minimum state requirements" - - which is precisely what those requirements are, minimum. Exceptions to the approved program route would include only reciprocity cases, vocational trade subjects, and additional endorsements in related fields.

The Superintendent, on the other hand, has proposed that exceptions to the approved program route include, in addition:

> ". . . individuals holding a baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution of higher learning who meet one or more of the endorsement requirements for Secondary Education (Grades 8-12) and who are recommended by the employing educational agency."

Thus, the desired loophole would be created through which anyone with a liberal arts degree could be employed at the same status, with the same certificate (Provisional) as a graduate of an approved program and have the same two years to elevate the certificate to the Collegiate Professional level. There would seem to be little advantage then, at least to those persons seeking a secondary endorsement, in pursuing an approved teacher education program. In

fact, a distinct disadvantage would accrue to individuals in approved programs who would be required to complete all the endorsement requirements plus a full program of professional education courses field experiences and student teaching!

All this is occurring in Virginia at the same time other states are tightening certification requirements. A recent survey of 48 states (excluding Alaska, Hawaii, and Virginia and including the District of Columbia) by faculty in the School of Education at Old Dominion University shows that 39 states anticipate strengthening requirements while only 9 states do not. Only one state responded affirmatively to a question regarding anticipated weakening of requirements. To a question regarding certification of liberal arts graduates, 26 states responded that they absolutely did not certify them, while 22 states reported a temporary certificate of some type (ODU Survey, 1981).

The Superintendent's proposed Provisional Certificate which makes no distinction between the approved program graduate and the liberal arts graduate, is non-renewable and valid for two years during which new teachers are evaluated on-the-job with respect to a list of competencies. Where and how are these competencies to be mastered? If a teacher has completed an <u>approved</u> program it is guaranteed that therein was included the necessary training - - plus <u>state mandated</u> early experiences, student teaching, and specified courses in human growth and development, curriculum and instruction, and foundations of education. If an individual enters teaching through the liberal arts route, the early experiences, student teaching, and professional courses are not required prior to employment. The first two years of teaching under the Provisional Certificate serve to substitute for student teaching and a plan is developed for:

> ". . . sixteen clock hours, or the equivalent, for each competency . . . (in) . . . work taken from an accredited

> college or university or through non-college credit and inservice activity . . . which have been approved by the division superintendent" (or headmaster in the case of a private school)

No mention is made of approved programs.

The result will be two teachers with equal certification (Provisional) teaching for two years during which they will be evaluated on-the-job and must receive a "positive rating" signed off by the Superintendent (or headmaster!) to be eligible for the Collegiate Professional Certificate (a 5-year renewable certificate). During the two years there will be one prepared teacher putting into practice the competencies achieved in an approved program - - including early experiences and student teaching - - and one teacher with no professional preparation and no classroom experience. Both teachers will be expected, from day one, to perform as professionals and will be accountable for the learning outcomes in their classrooms. They will be expected to understand human growth and development and child behavior, use theories of learning, plan and deliver instruction, construct and interpret tests, select and specify appropriate learning objectives, group for instruction, use computer-assisted instruction, identify and refer exceptional children, use a variety of instructional techniques and materials, employ question-asking strategies, employ alternative modes of teaching, know the legal responsibilities of teachers, incorporate the findings of classroom teaching/learning research, and more (VACTE, 1981) - - all that is expected of a classroom teacher and some of which is mandated by the state legislature!

What is happening in the classroom while the liberal arts graduate is achieving these competencies according to his/her plan? What is happening to the pupils while the teacher is learning to teach?

These concerns are precisely parallel to those expressed in the NEA's draft document Excellence in Our Schools, Action Plan, Teacher Education (NEA, 1981). This document points out that "the complexity of current society and the breadth of public expectation for teachers no longer allow deficit entry followed by on-the-job learning and development." In addition, it is quite specific that "the initial license should assure that the beginning teacher is sufficiently educated to provide competent instructional services to students and is capable of independent and continuous professional development." (Needless to say, these statements focus on weak approved programs as well as on a lack of professional education.)

One of the most significant innovations in the current proposals involves the awarding of the Provisional Certificate followed by a two year "probationary" period during which teachers are evaluated. Important differences in "evaluation" surface in the TEAC proposal and the Superintendent's proposal.

In the TEAC proposal, the burden of completing certification requirements is on the candidate while he/she is completing the approved program. The approved program itself is evaluated every five years for purposes of reaccreditation by the State Department of Education. The proposal also calls for a "three year evaluated probationary period" which, as of October, 1981, has not been detailed.

The Superintendent's proposal allows for both the approved program route with its five-year programmatic evaluation by the State Department of Education and the "quick and dirty method" that provides certification through the liberal arts degree route. Both routes lead to the Provisional Certificate. However, in the Superintendent's proposal, every teacher must receive a "positive rating gained through an evaluation of performances in the classroom during the first two years of teaching." The proposal does not spell out how this positive rating is to be achieved, what the criteria will be, or what a positive rating

will entail. Rumors are rampant as to how this evaluation will be implemented but no details appear in the proposal.

An assistant superintendent in the State Department of Education, in a conference at James Madison University in July, 1981, explained that the Superintendent is considering a three-person evaluation team. The team would probably be composed of a classroom teacher (peer), an administrator, and a faculty member in higher education. It was pointed out that in the selection of this team the teacher being evaluated would probably be allowed to select the peer evaluator. The administrator might be the building principal or another administrator in the school division. The higher education person would be chosen from a "selected pool" by the State Department of Education. The State Department would be responsible for training the evaluation team and administering the evaluation process.

It is interesting that although every other requirement for certification is spelled out in detail in the proposal, this critical one is not. Yet, the public has been allowed to read, study, and react to the proposals at the October hearings and the State Board of Education will be asked to vote on them in December. Several important questions remain unanswered. Has the evaluation procedure been finalized in the minds of the Superintendent and his staff? Is the Superintendent asking for carte blanche in the evaluation procedure? The proposal seems to be asking to be bought like a "pig in a poke"!

The Assistant Superintendent also reported that even though a plan similar to the George Teacher Assessment Plan was being considered, the Virginia evaluation plan would not be the Georgia Plan. In fact, six states involved in teacher evaluation were visited to review their plans and procedures - - including Georgia. Members of the Georgia State Department of Education responsible for the teacher assessment program conducted a workshop for the Virginia State Department of Education in July, 1981. However, it was reiterated that

the Superintendent would not be proposing the Georgia Plan, but some of the "strengths" would be included.

Although the VEA is not supporting the Superintendent's proposal, they are very interested in the teacher performance evaluation plan, whatever it may be. VEA staff are not opposed to the concept of evaluation. They are justifiably alarmed that the Superintendent would propose a requirement for certificate elevation and expect the public to support it without spelling out the requirements.

In September and October, 1981, word began filtering out of various superintendents' meetings that they were not particularly interested in becoming involved in the teacher preparation and certification process. The major concern appears to be the direct involvement of school divisions in the evaluation of teachers during the proposed probationary period and the high cost of developing and implementing the system. In addition, the concept of delayed professional certification coupled with tenure decisions could result in legal nightmares.

In July, 1980, the National Teacher Examinations were required by the state for teacher certification. Both proposals continue this requirement. However, the state has no cut-off score for the NTE and a validation study will not be completed in Virginia until September, 1983. It is interesting that the press and state legislators have praised this required test as a step forward in improving the competency of Virginia teachers. However, the Educational Testing Service itself points out that the NTE measures only a candidate's recall knowledge of the teacher preparation courses agreed upon by educators as necessary for a teacher to have mastered. The NTE in no way claims that there is a correlation between the scores and teacher performance. However, some of the public and press are pushing for a cut-off score to eliminate "incompetent teachers!"

An interesting question arises related to the evaluation of a teacher's performance by an outside evaluation team. The Code of Virginia states that the certification of teachers is the responsibility of the State Board of Education on the recommendation of the State Superintendent. However, an integral part of the evaluation process of teacher certification proposed by the Superintendent includes a team from outside the State Department of Education. Given 140 school divisions and approximately 200 private secondary schools, the magnitude of the problem becomes obvious. A two-fold question arises. Is the Superintendent proposing to involve people in the field in the teacher certification process, or, is the Superintendent proposing that the State give away its right to certification to a multi-team process? Either way, the Superintendent seems to be asking the public to approve an evaluation process for teachers with no idea of what the process will be. This "pig in a poke" concept is not being bought by the teacher education public in the state even though the politicians, the State Board of Education and the press feel it is a great step forward.

The "battle of Richmond" is being fought to determine "who shall control teacher certification in Virginia." An interesting and long sought for coalition has developed as the various professional groups in the state have recognized that concerted action is the means to achieve the goal of quality teacher education. Groups as diverse as the Virginia Education Association and the Virginia Association of Colleges of Teacher Education have, for the first time, worked together for the common cause.

The code of Virginia clearly designates the State Board of Education as the responsible authority. However, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction has placed the State Board of Education in the unprecedented position of choosing between the recommendations of the Teacher Education Advisory Committee and the Superintendent. Rather than working together toward the common goal of

the best public education for the children of Virginia, the highest educational authorities have been thrust into adversary positions. Has the battle become more important than the cause? December, 1981 will determine who wins the battle; December, 1995, will determine whether the children of Virginia are the winners or losers.

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